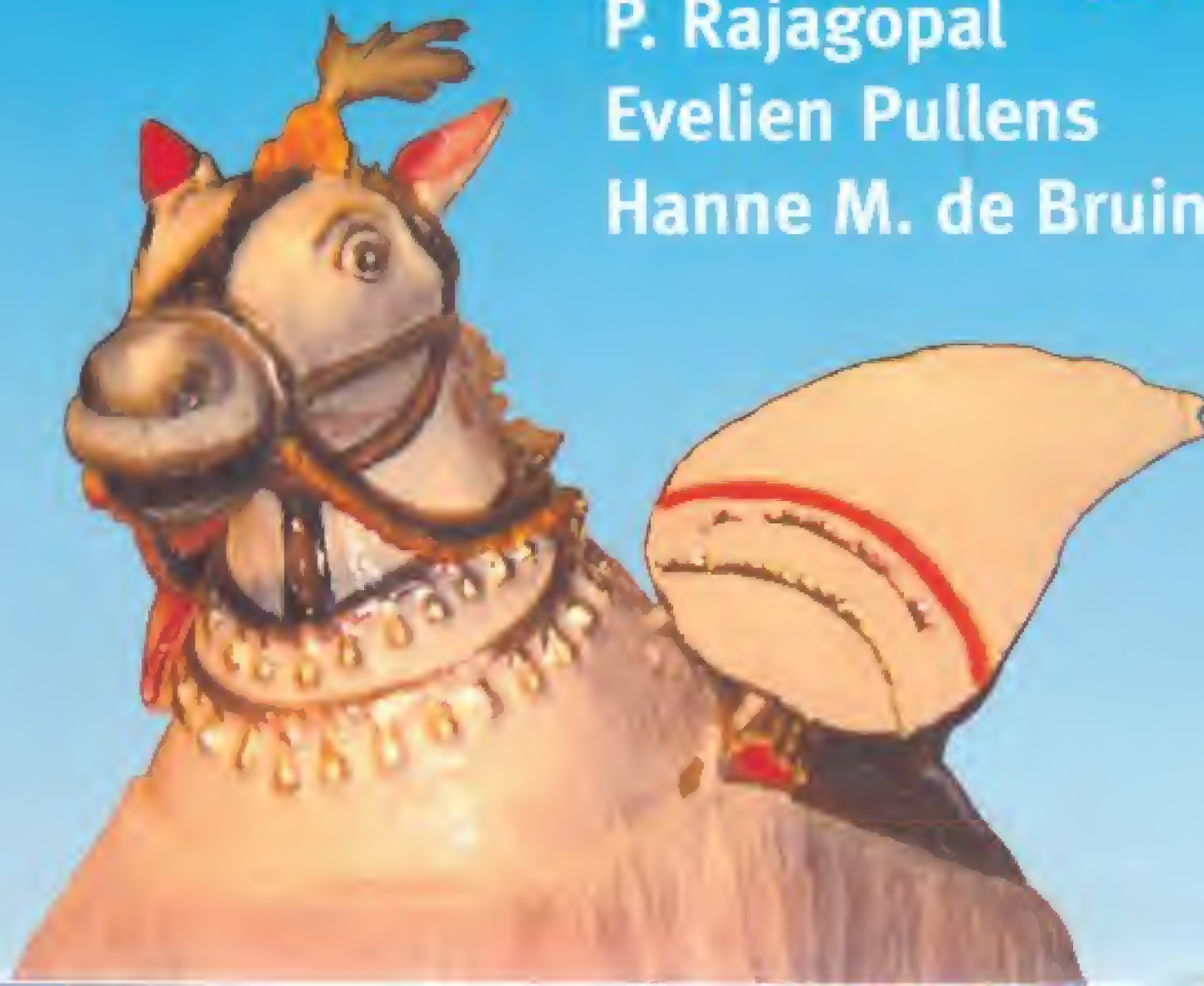


# Aiyappan & The Magic Horse



P. Rajagopal  
Evelien Pullens  
Hanne M. de Bruin



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# Foreword

‘Maya Kudirai’ or **The Magic Horse** gallops from a Kanchipuram theatre tradition called Kattai Koothu (same as Kuttu), which is more than 200 years old. There are many forms of Koothu in Tamilnadu, and what makes Kattai Koothu different are the heavy and elaborate head, shoulder and other accoutrements made of wood that the performers wear. I congratulate P. Rajagopal and Hanne M. de Bruin, the founders of Kattaikuttu Sangam, for establishing the distinction of Kattai Koothu, and for training young performers, mostly non-literate agricultural workers, to develop stamina and understand spatial awareness and balance — vital tools for the performer.

‘Maya Kudirai’ has a local-global perspective as well. Its performers cross cultural boundaries and share with us a local gaze on being and experiencing what millions of immigrants and migrants undergo: otherness. It has twists of humour and lightness, and is as valid in India as it was ground-breaking when I first commissioned it at Leicester Haymarket Theatre, U. K., and subsequently at the Manchester Commonwealth Games in the nineties. Neither language nor a region-specific theatre form came in the way of Rajagopal’s excellent and tremendously successful workshops with young people in the U.K.

I am delighted that Tulika Publishers responded with their visionary activism to the need for texts of process about theatre that bridge the gulf between English-spoken theatre in India’s metropolises and grassroots theatre from the regions. Kattaikuttu Sangam and Tulika have made accessible to children and adults a book about a complex performance process in a manner that is sophisticated yet remarkably user-friendly. I urge teachers, in particular, to take this shared dream and recreate in their classrooms the wonder of learning through childhood and performance.

**Dr Vayu Naidu, FRSA**

Lecturer Performance Storytelling

Department of Drama and Theatre Studies

University of Kent

Canterbury

England



**FROM FAR AWAY** you can hear the sound of drums, harmonium and the shrill tone of a *mukavinai*. Bare-footed children run to the half-open shed covered with thatch made from palm leaves. They join the music, clapping their hands, faster and faster. Suddenly they stop. Somebody begins to sing in a powerful voice.

It is a song from a Kattaikkuttu performance. The grandparents of the children used to listen to this song in villages where *Kuttu* (pronounced as koothu) was performed all night long. But what about their children and grandchildren? Do they still like to listen to these songs today? And what exactly is Kuttu?

Kattaikkuttu, or Kuttu as it is popularly known, is a musical theatre from Tamilnadu. Nobody knows exactly how old it is or where it came from. The plays are stories from the Mahabharata, a long and very old narrative. The actors play kings, gods, goddesses and demons. They wear beautiful costumes and their faces are made-up with many different colours and designs. They sing and act and dance. Some of the songs need special dance steps. One of them is the *kirikki*, a fast spinning movement that takes a lot of practice.

Kuttu is also a ritual theatre. Performances are held in honour of a deity, most of the time a goddess. People pray to her for good health, rain and success. They affectionately call her amman or 'mother'. The goddess is worshipped through rituals and offerings. Kuttu is such an offering. At the end of her procession through the village, people will place the statue of the goddess opposite the stage so that she can watch the performance. They believe that it will keep her happy. When the young and old sit together to watch a Kuttu performance, they feel the power of the songs and the old stories come to life during the night.





A powerful King struts across the stage speaking a heroic language. He wears a skirt like a hoop, a big crown, and huge ornaments on both shoulders. Absorbed in his own arrogance, he forgets about his servant, the clown. The Buffoon sees his chance and sits on the King's throne. He announces that his master's time is up and declares himself to be his successor, the 'King of Buffoons'. It does not take long before the King realises that his position has been taken. The Buffoon receives a good beating. The audience enjoys itself. Who is the real fool here?





**THE MAGIC HORSE** is about two schoolchildren, Mandodari and Taandavaraayan. On their way home from school one day, they happen to meet two aliens who look different and speak a strange language. And they seem to have a problem but they don't know what it is. Taandavaraayan decides to ask his friend, the monkey Aadi, for help. Aadi finds out that the aliens are called Kadak Kadak and Modak Modak. He believes they have lost their sakti, that is, their power to go back to where they came from. The children and Aadi decide to help the strangers. In the course of their search for sakti, Mandodari, Taandavaraayan, Aadi, Kadak Kadak and Modak Modak meet other animals and people. Some of them would like to help, but they cannot because they do not have the right skills. Others could help, but refuse to. Eventually, it is Buffoon Kaamini who, unknowingly, reveals a magical solution.





You can read this book in different ways. On the left pages you will find the script of the play **The Magic Horse** which the students of the Kattaikuttu School performed in August 2003. On the right pages you will find the story of 15-year-old Aiyappan who studies at the School because he wants to be an actor. You can read all left pages first and then the right. Or you can read one page after the other and discover how Aiyappan and **The Magic Horse** are related.



## Cast of The Magic Horse

Mandodari	Schoolgirl from the village Mandaarai
Taandavaraayan	Her brother
Kadak Kadak	An alien (male)
Modak Modak	An alien (female)
Aadi	A monkey who existed long before humans
Parandaaman	Old and strong tortoise
Mahaabhutam	Magician, most important person in the Mandaarai forest
Doctor Asaimani	Doctor Money-love who likes her money better than her patients
Nurse Nakmaa	Only a voice
Buffoon Kaamini	Showman, a funny character





The play begins . . .

**Mandodari** We go to school—

**Taandavaraayan** Who's we?

**Mandodari** Silly! You and me!

**Taandavaraayan** Ah! Me!

**Mandodari** And me!

**Taandavaraayan** Oho! We!

**Mandodari & Taandavaraayan**

Kids go to school  
And use their brains.  
But they are best  
At playing games.

**Taandavaraayan**

I hate school.  
Study? Not for me!  
School is hell.  
Don't you agree?  
The teacher's words  
Just fly away.  
I've no idea  
What he wants to say.

**Mandodari**

School is hell?  
Don't be a fool!  
Our dear teacher  
Is very cool.





**T**his morning Aiyappan wakes up early. It is still dark. He can hear the other children breathe.

Aiyappan sleeps on the floor of one of the classrooms together with his friends. The Kattaikkuttu School is their home. Here they eat, sleep, study, cry, fight and play. Most of the children come from villages quite far away. They go home once a month.

Aiyappan turns around slowly enjoying the moment of laziness. Today they will rehearse the new play.

Aiyappan plays the Buffoon in the play. Silently he repeats the lines of his text: “While I was asleep I must have forgotten what I was called..... Let’s all lie down and close our eyes. Think of the power you need, imagine sakti and you will get it.”

“Could I do that too?” he asks himself. He closes his eyes and imagines that he is on stage. It feels good. He makes faces and improvises a joke. The audience laughs. Aiyappan feels his power grow.

When he opens his eyes he realises that it was just a dream. The wonderful feeling is gone. His body is all arms and legs. And his voice no longer does what he wants it to do. It has become heavier too.

But there is no time to worry. The morning routine has started. The boys roll their mats and put them away. Still sleepy they drink their morning coffee, bathe and put on their uniforms: shorts and a T-shirt — every day a different colour. It is 7.30. Classes begin. First English. Then maths, Tamil, science, social science and computer lessons. After lunch they have music and theatre training.



**Mandodari** Hey Donkey!

**Taandavaraayan** What's the matter, Monkey?

**Mandodari** What did you say? Who's a monkey here?

**Taandavaraayan** You are!

**Mandodari** No, you are!

**Taandavaraayan** You are!

**Mandodari** [Whining] I'm going to tell Father...

**Taandavaraayan** Don't be a sissy! You called me Donkey so I called you Monkey. Call me Taandavaraayan and I will call you Mandodari. Okay?

**Mandodari** Okay!

**Taandavaraayan** Come on, Monkey-Mandoo, let's play for some time!

**Mandodari** There! You said it again!

**Taandavaraayan** Sorry! Come, let's play hide and seek!

**Mandodari** Shall we play over there?

**Mandodari**

Run brother, run!  
One, two, three!  
Hide brother, hide!  
Joot! You're free!

**Taandavaraayan**

Come, sister, come,  
Before I fly away,  
Try, sister, try,  
You won't catch me today.

**Taandavaraayan** I know where to hide. Find me if you can!

**Mandodari** Get lost!

[Mandodari & Taandavaraayan exit.]

தாண்டவரா  
Donkey Taandoo  
மண்டோரி  
Monkey Mandoo





Here are Aiyappan and his friends, Devan, Dillibabu and Anbarasu. Playing cricket is their favourite hobby.

The girls play hopscotch and set up shop.

And boys and girls together? They play hide and seek.

When they are not playing, some of the children rehearse their roles. Today Tilakavathi shows Raamamurthi how to behave as a lady. Raamamurthi plays Mandodari in the new play. Mandodari is a girl. So Raamamurthi has to learn how to walk like a girl and to use his hands elegantly. Tilakavathi demonstrates. She is a good dancer. Raamamurthi tries to copy her but it is not as easy as he thought it would be.

Until today all Kuttu performers have been men. They play both male and female roles.

In India, as in many countries all over the world, it is often more difficult for a woman to become a performer than it is for a man. To act in public in front of strange men is not considered proper for a girl. It is the same in Kuttu. Many parents feel it is not right for their daughters to become professional actresses and to work alongside men in the same group. Where would they change their costumes? What would other people say?

Perhaps that will change in the future. There are eight girls at the Kattaikkuttu School and they learn exactly the same things as the boys.



kada kada kada kada, moda moda moda moda  
கட கட கட கட, மொ மொ மொ மொ  
மொ மொ மொ மொ மொ மொ மொ மொ

[Two children hold a curtain across the stage.  
Enter Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak.]

### **Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak**

Blown across the galaxy  
Like cotton fluff,  
Kadak Kadak and Modak Modak  
Have landed in another world.

Kada kada kada kada, moda moda moda moda,  
Kada kada kada kada, moda moda moda moda.  
Kadak Kadak and Modak Modak  
Have landed on Planet Earth.

[Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak walk around the stage looking curiously  
at everything. Enter Mandodari & Taandavaraayan.]





Aiyappan left his old school when he was nine. The leader of the Kuttu group in his village took him on as an apprentice. He told Aiyappan that he could learn Kuttu and earn some money at the same time. Aiyappan remembers how proud he was. Working in a theatre group seemed so much more exciting than going to school. Yet things worked out differently.

Kuttu performances begin at ten in the night and go on until six the next morning. Aiyappan got used to staying awake all night. He worked hard and tried to make up for lost sleep during the daytime. But there were always errands to run for the leader of the group who lived nearby. And when his younger brother came home from school there was nobody to cook for them. Their parents and older sisters worked in the big city, Chennai, as construction labourers. So Aiyappan and his brother had to do the cooking themselves. During this time, Aiyappan became thin and tired.

When Aiyappan was thirteen, Kuttu actor and teacher Rajagopal asked him if he would like to join the new Kattaikkuttu School. There he could combine acting with learning to read and write better. Aiyappan did not know what to say. Would his parents allow him to go back to school? They would have to give up the money that he earned as a child-actor. Luckily they did not say 'no'. And so he left the theatre group and . . . was blown into another world.



**Mandodari** Did you see them? Those two creatures..... I'm afraid!

**Taandavaraayan** Don't be afraid. Let's get a little closer!

**Mandodari** No, no, I don't want to. I'm really scared!

**Kadak Kadak** Pada pada pada pada pandang!

**Taandavaraayan** It looks as if they're calling us. Come!

**Modak Modak** Kida kida kida kida kidaang!

**Mandodari** What are they saying?

**Taandavaraayan** I don't know. Come, let's get nearer!

*[Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak see the children. They move around them, touching them gently while talking to each other in their own language.]*

**Modak Modak** Padaang kidaang, padaang kidaang....

**Kadak Kadak**

Oibibiya kus kus kasaaya suppis,  
Vegikari saapis rusi adu kas kis,  
Oiy oiy oiy oiy rusi adu kas kis.

**Modak Modak**

Makkaanis koki pakkini aakki,  
Ikkaani mikki vakkini taakki,  
Sokkini tukkitudu — kum kum,  
Sokkini tukkitudu.

**Taandavaraayan** I don't get it!

**Kadak Kadak** Kabraang kabraang kabraang....

**Modak Modak** Tudaang tudaang tudaang....

**Mandodari** I don't understand a thing. Maybe our Aadi knows their language?

**Taandavaraayan** You're right. I'm sure Aadi will know. Come, let's go get him.

*[Exit all.]*



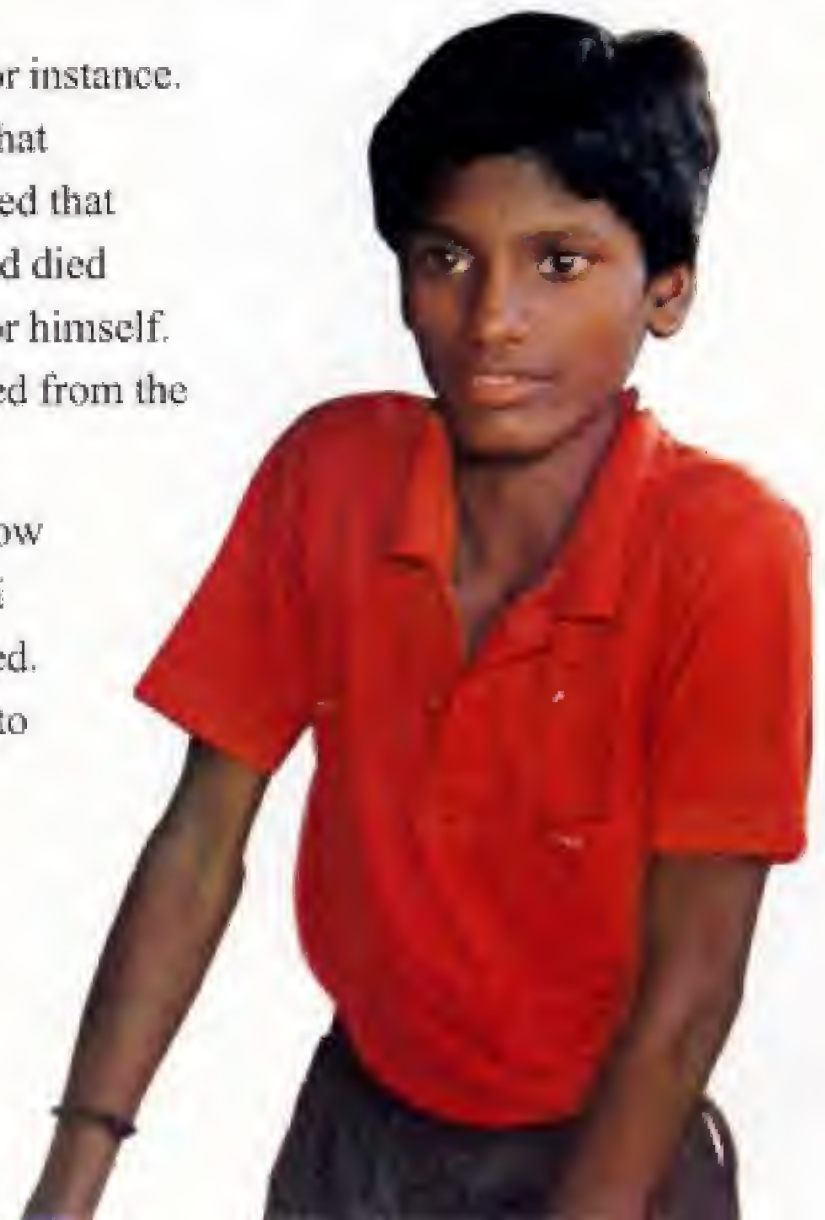
At first everything was new and strange. There were thirty children between five and fifteen years old at the Kattaikkuttu School. They all spoke Tamil. But they did not always understand each other.

Aiyappan stayed aloof.

That's what he always did when he met new people. As the youngest player in a Kuttu company he had learned very early how to protect himself from the outside world: never be too eager to make friends.

Other children reacted differently. Velucchaami for instance. He could suddenly start a fight. Everybody could see that Velucchaami was not happy. Then Aiyappan discovered that Velucchaami had nightmares about his mother. She had died when he was little and Velucchaami was left to fend for himself. He grew up in the streets of his village where he learned from the older boys how to engage in filmy fights.

Many things have changed now. The children know each other through and through. They let Velucchaami sleep in the middle and his nightmares have disappeared. He doesn't fight anymore. Instead, he uses his energy to perform kirikkis at high speed.



ikkaani meekki vakkini taakki  
இக்கனமேக்கி வக்கினிதாக்கி

[Enter Aadi.]

**Aadi**

My name Aadi, don't you know?  
Very strong – I will show,  
How I shake the cosmic plan,  
Super-Aadi, I'm your man.  
This boy's best friend, don't you see?  
Never better guy than me.  
I know many handy tricks.  
Super-Aadi, I can fix.

**Taandavaraayan**

My dear friend Aadi,  
The latest have you heard?  
We met these strange characters,  
They're neither humans nor birds.

**Taandavaraayan** Aadi, on our way home from school we bumped into two aliens.

**Mandodari** They didn't look like human beings or animals. We couldn't understand what they were saying. That's why we have come to fetch you. Please help us!

**Aadi** What's that, Mandodari, Taandavaraayan? Two creatures you've never seen before? And you can't understand them? All right, let's go and see who they are!

[Exit Aadi, Mandodari & Taandavaraayan.]





It is three in the afternoon. The music lessons are over. Three children carry the harmonium, mridangam and dholak to the training shed. The old actor, Masilamani, is already seated behind the musicians' bench. He will beat out the rhythm with a pair of metal hand cymbals. Music is very important in Kuttu. Without music there's no theatre. Therefore the musicians are always present during the acting classes.

The actors, Shanmugam and Saravanan, tuck in their veshtis. They play in a professional theatre group. But during the rainy season they teach at the Kuttu School. Sometimes they demonstrate steps or show how a heroic Kattai vesham, such as a king or demon, should stand on stage.

When master teacher Rajagopal (pronounced Raajagopaal) enters, silence descends. The children find their places in three long rows on the mud floor. Aiyappan is one of the tallest boys in the group. He sits in the back with Devan and Anbarasu. Rajagopal begins with a traditional opening song for Ganesha. He sings the first line and the children repeat after him in one massive chorus. That's singing in Kuttu style – one lead singer on stage and a chorus in the back.



[Aadi, Mandodari & Taandavaraayan and Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak enter.]

**Aadi** [to Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak]

Tell me:

How you come, what you want?  
Fight with Aadi? Huh, you can't!  
Funny chaps, shake my hands,  
Aadi want, you be friends.

**Aadi** Scratch my bottom! Such cool creatures  
I've never seen. Where are you from?

**Kadak Kadak** Kabraang kabraang kabraang!

**Modak Modak** Tudaang tudaang tudaang!

**Aadi** So you are from up above! And you are in need of strength? That's no problem.  
Let's ask my friend Parandaaman. By the way, what are your names?

**Kadak Kadak** Kadak Kadak.

**Modak Modak** Modak Modak.

**Taandavaraayan** Aadi, do you understand what they're saying?

**Aadi** They are from the world above. They are called Kadak Kadak and Modak Modak. And they are looking for their lost strength. The person to consult in this matter is, of course, my friend Parandaaman.

**Mandodari** Who's that Parandaaman?

**Aadi** You don't know? Come, I'll show you. [To Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak] You two stay where you are!

**Kadak Kadak** Shikkidupakkidukkaa!

[Exit all.]





Today they start with the Aadi scene. Dillibabu plays the monkey. He's really good at it. He pumps his chubby cheeks full of air, makes big eyes and looks for fleas in his fur. All the children laugh and try to imitate him. Dillibabu sings:

My name Aadi, don't you know?  
Very strong – I will show,  
How I shake the cosmic plan,  
Super-Aadi, I'm your man.

And the chorus repeats: Super-Aadi, I'm your man.

Dillibabu has to learn the movements too. Rajagopal demonstrates. "Move sideways with small steps. And you can also walk up to the front, close to the children seated in the first row. Smart and funny. That's right. Make the audience laugh but do not forget to walk to the beats!"

Aiyappan likes what his friend Dilli does. But Dillibabu should be bolder. The monkey of the play is not shy at all. He is cheeky and a little arrogant. He thinks he knows everything because he was there on earth from the beginning, long before human beings came along.



[Curtain entrance Parandaaman.]

**Parandaaman**

Let us sing of the great Parandaaman,  
Who measured the Earth,  
And rested at the bottom of the Ocean of Milk.  
Let us sing of Vishnu wearing a jewel so blue,  
Who lives in famous Perungattuur.  
Let us sing of the Bejewelled One.  
Let us sing of Raajagopaalan,  
Master of the arts.  
Let us praise the king of verse.





In Kuttu, important characters begin their performance with an entrance song. It is sung behind a curtain held across the stage by two helpers. The spectators can see only the top of the head or head-gear, and the feet of the performer, but they do not know who he is. In **The Magic Horse** the character hidden by the curtain is not the usual heroic king, but the tortoise, Parandaaman.

The tortoise is one of the many incarnations of the god Vishnu. Through this song the actor prays to Lord Vishnu. He asks the god to protect and help him during the performance. The song refers to the different stories about Vishnu that many people know. In one story, when the gods and demons want to churn the waters of the ocean of milk, Vishnu takes the form of a tortoise and lies at the bottom of the sea so that they can use his shell as a foundation upon which to rest the churning stick.

Rajagopal or Raajagopaalan is one of the many names of Vishnu. It is also the name of the author of **The Magic Horse**. Authors of Kattaikkuttu songs and plays often add their names to the last lines of a song as a kind of signature. In that way they will always be remembered.





[Aadi, Mandodari & Taandavaraayan enter.]

**Aadi** Dear Parandaaman, how are you?

**Parandaaman** I am well. Tell me, how are you? And who are they?

**Aadi** They are my friends.

**Taandavaraayan** Vanakkam. My name is Taandavaraayan.

**Mandodari** And I am Mandodari.

**Parandaaman** Tell me, why have you come to see me?

**Aadi** My friend! We have two guests. They need your help.  
Will you come with us, please?

**Parandaaman** Fine, let's go. I'd like to meet them.





Rajagopal was born in Perungattu. He is proud of his village. Therefore, he has mentioned it in the song. He learned Kuttu in the theatre company of his father. Kattaikkuttu is an oral tradition. You learn it by singing in the background chorus and by listening to a master teacher or vaathiyaar. You have to repeat the song-lines and dialogues again and again so that you can recall them at any moment. At the end of the training you have to know by heart the scripts of more than twenty all-night plays.

At the age of ten, Rajagopal left school, just like Aiyappan. His father was not happy about it. He wanted his son to study. Life as an actor is hard and there's little money in it. But secretly he may have been proud of his actor-son, too, and glad that his art had found a successor. Not so many boys choose to be a Kuttu actor these days. Today there are only a few good teachers who can pass on the tradition to the next generation.



[Kadak Kadak & Madak Madak enter.]

### Mandodari

Aadi and Parandaaman  
Let us proceed,  
And find out what our dear visitors  
Really need.

### Taandavaraayan

Who could they be?  
How did they travel?  
It's a mystery  
We must unravel.

### Aadi

Uh! You think them scary?  
Hmm, nothing extraordinary!  
Let days go by.  
Wait and see  
What miracles  
Will be!

**Aadi** Wait and see what happens as time unfolds!

**Kadak Kadak** Talaankidu talaankidu talaankidu.

**Modak Modak** Tideending tideending tideending.

**Parandaaman** Dear strangers, tell me what you need  
and I will help you!

தளங்கிடு தளங்கிடு

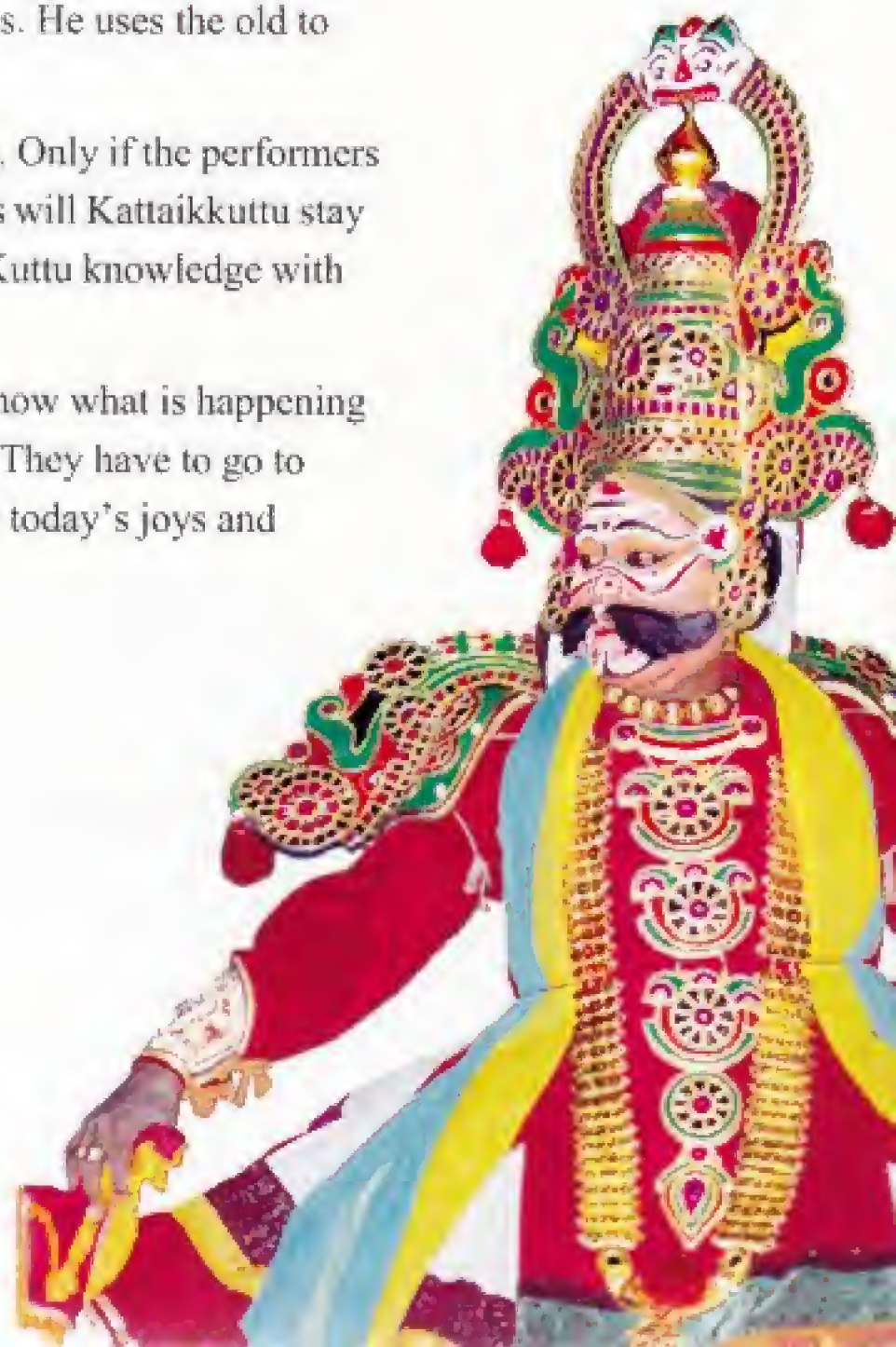
Talaankidu talaankidu talaankidu.  
தளங்கிடு



Rajagopal has strong ideas about Kuttu. As an actor Rajagopal has experienced the power of the old plays. It takes many years to understand them fully and to learn to perform them well. But he writes new plays too — long, all-night ones and shorter ones, like *The Magic Horse*, which carry his own ideas and new themes. He uses the old to explore the new.

What is really needed now is quality training. Only if the performers know the tradition in all its many different aspects will Kattaikkuttu stay alive. In addition, it is important to combine old Kuttu knowledge with new, actual information.

Rajagopal feels that Kuttu students should know what is happening in the world and be able to talk about it on stage. They have to go to school and study. The theatre should link up with today's joys and problems. Only then will Kuttu flourish.



### Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak

Tidaang di daan tandi tanda taan.  
Taana tandada tandi?

Tidaang di daan tandi tanda taan.  
Toododi tondudi dondi?

Tidat tidat tidandida dindi,  
Padaang padaang pandida pandi.  
Pada pada pandi,  
Kida kida kindi.

We've lost our sakti.  
Where, what, why?  
We've lost our sakti.  
How can we fly?

Find our sakti,  
Any, many, some.  
Find our sakti,  
To take us home.

Padaang padaang pandida pandi

படாங் படாங் பண்டி பண்டி





In the next scene of the play the two aliens, Kadak Kadak and Modak Modak, meet the tortoise Parandaaman. Two children carry Parandaaman's shell to the back of the training space. It is made of bamboo and *papier mâché*. Gobinaath ducks underneath the shell. He takes Parandaaman's head in his hands. He can manipulate the head from within. When Parandaaman talks, Gobinaath sticks out the head. When there is nothing to say he withdraws it into the shell.

Anbarasu and Tamilarasan play the aliens. When they see the old and wise Parandaaman they swing their arms and bounce up and down with funny little jerks to show their excitement. Aiyappan cannot help smiling when he looks at them. Imagine the actors in his old theatre group — they would never play such roles. They did only old stuff, plays from the Mahabharata. In those plays you would find kings, gods, ministers and brahmans, but never aliens, a tortoise or schoolchildren.

"We have lost our sakti," Anbarasu and Tamilarasan sing.

"Where, what, why . . . ?"  
Tamilarasan has forgotten his lines and looks at Rajagopal. He is not sure what to do. Some children begin to giggle.



Kabraang kabraang kabraang.  
கப்டாங் கப்டாங் கப்டாங்

**Kadak Kadak** Kabraang kabraang kabraang.

**Modak Modak** Tudaang tudaang tudaang.

**Aadi** Hey Cool Cats, this is my friend. Very, very strong! Don't worry, he'll help you, sure!

**Mandodari** Silly Aadi! You've got it all wrong! They don't need a strong person. It looks as though they want to fly. Parandaaman Sir, can you fly?

**Parandaaman**

Children, I have lived long, but I have never learned to fly.  
I can crawl on land and swim in water — and all this, I must admit,  
I will do at my own pace, which you may find too slow to go by.

**Parandaaman** Listen, children, honoured visitors, friend Aadi, I cannot fly. I can only walk. But, children, if these aliens are in need of sakti there is a masterful Mahaabhutam, a great magician. Why don't you consult him? He can give them power.

**Taandavaraayan** All right, then.

**Parandaaman** You go first. I shall join you by and by.

**Mandodari** Let us go.

**Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak** Puraam puraam puraam.

[Exit all.]





“Don’t laugh!” Rajagopal tells his students. “I am sure that all of you sometimes feel like Kadak Kadak and Modak Modak. You would like to fly but you cannot, you don’t know what to do. You are afraid that all power has left you. Take your time. Allow yourself to learn at your own pace. Don’t aim too high too soon. Find out where your strength lies and you will become wonderful performers.”



After the class there is a meeting. The children sit in a big circle. Rajagopal tells them that they are ready to perform **The Magic Horse**. He has fixed the date for the arangetram, the first public performance, for next Sunday. A whisper goes around the group. Aiyappan feels excited and a little bit afraid too.

“Would someone like to say something?” Rajagopal asks. The children are silent. Velucchaami scratches his head and then raises his hand slowly. “Next time I want to play Aadi,” he admits. “Looks like the real one,” somebody says and everybody starts laughing. “Don’t do that,” Rajagopal says. “I have told you, everybody learns in his or her own time. Velucchaami still has a lot to learn, but I am sure he will become a wonderful Aadi!” Velucchaami beams.

“Anyone else with something to say?”

Aiyappan looks around. He likes meetings a lot. Not that he wants to say anything. He listens. The others speak about a small fight. Fights don’t last long. They’re not important. The circle is. It’s like a Kuttu performance. The actors and the audience feel united. It is a strong emotion. Different from everything on television or in the cinema. And suddenly he knows why he likes these meetings so much.



*[Mahaabhutam enters behind curtain.]*

**Mahaabhutam**

Here comes the Great Magician  
With shoulders huge as mountains.  
An expert in cunning matters  
Worshipping the feet.....

*[Percussion joins the melody and the actor dances.]*

Of the blue-throated Siva,  
The commander of an army of ghosts  
That roams the Earth surrounded by seas,  
Stopping dead and moving forward  
at the God's orders.

*[Curtain is whisked away.]*



The next day, Suganya runs to Aiyappan and his friends. "Today we're going to try our costumes!" Everybody stops and listens. A dress rehearsal. That's fun! The children rush to the hall where the costumes are kept ready. Some dresses and ornaments hang on a line. Others have been laid out in neat piles on the floor. Aiyappan knows which costume is his. The red trousers with the red and blue jacket and the trendy cap. He hopes the trousers still fit because he has grown a lot.

Suganya puts on the costume of the Mahaabhutam. She is very excited. The baggy black trousers first, then the matching black jacket. The yellow starched petticoats and the wide skirt. And then the Kattai ornaments made of painted wood inlaid with little mirrors and lined with gold thread. Two small oval ornaments on each side of her ears. Gold coloured bands around her upper arms and wrists. And finally the gorgeous headset with white feathers. Suganya is sweating. She can barely walk.

"It must be heavy," Aiyappan thinks, "and she does not even wear the huge crown that all important Kuttu kings wear." He wonders whether Suganya can pull it off. She's just turned ten and is small for her age.



**Mahaabhutam** [*This song is a 'surul pattu' sung at high speed.*]

I have come, the Mahaabhutam.  
I have come, a great Magician.  
Crushing trumpeting elephants,  
Roaring like a lion, furious.  
While the dummy-demons celebrate my tyranny,  
I'll seize the gods who run away so panicky.  
Seize them, I will, and beat them up.  
Pierce their hearts full of fear.  
And pulverise them  
With a thick club — this I swear!  
When the immortals see me they'll leap in fright.  
Falling over each other during their hurried flight.  
There's no one like me in this bloody world.  
When I decide to go to battle  
Hari, Brahma and Siva take to their heels.  
For when did these Gods show any mettle?  
Sabash!

*[The Mahaabhutam hits the performance bench forcefully with his wooden sword before he sits down, eyes bulging, mouth slightly open to reveal a double-bent tongue, signifying the ultimate threat.]*

**Mahaabhutam** The people of Mandaarai live in constant fear of me. They call me the Mahaabhutam, because I have the power to create Magic. I will pull out the guts of any idiot who dares to appear before me. I will drink his blood. I will skin him alive. I will scorch his flesh and throw it as food for the birds. I will finish him off. In this world there's no one equal to me..., Ahaahaahaa!

*[Sound of Taandavaraayan & Mandodari, Aadi, Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak approaching.]*

**Mahaabhutam** Do I hear a sound? Let's see what's up!





The Mahaabhutam is modelled on a traditional Kattai character who wears wooden arm ornaments and ankle-bells, and carries a small wooden sword in his hand. His make-up is elaborate and typical of a 'villain' character in Kuttu. In *The Magic Horse*, this 'villain' character is played by Suganya, a girl. Because the large wooden crown is too heavy for Suganya, Saravanan-teacher has made a crown for her of cardboard decorated with gold paper and white feathers. The black and yellow petticoats have been adjusted to Suganya's height. Also Kadak Kadak and Modak Modak wear Kattai ornaments for the ears, head and arms, wide skirts and trousers. Because they are not from this world, they have been given ash-blond hair. Their make-up is inspired by traditional Kuttu make-up. But different colour combinations and funnily shaped decorations have been used to accentuate their strangeness, their 'alien'ness.



**Mandodari & Taandavaraayan**

Great Magician,  
Please bless us with your grace,  
And show these visitors to Mandaarai,  
How to return to their own place.

**Mahaabhutam**

How dare you stand before me without shame?  
I am allergic to little kids. They're such a pain.  
I am the Mahaabhutam whose Magic can kill.  
Where did you find the courage to approach me at will?



**Mahaabhutam** Ei kids! Who are you? How dare you stand before me without a grain of respect! See what I do to you!

**Mandodari** Great One, please don't do anything to us. We're so afraid!

**Mahaabhutam** Afraid? Then why did you come here? *[Turning to Aadi and the aliens]*  
And who are they?

**Taandavaraayan** This is my friend Aadi. Those two standing over there are visitors to our world.  
It's because of them that we have come in search of you, Sir.

**Kadak Kadak** Kabraang kabraang kabraang.

**Modak Modak** Tudaang tudang tudaang.

**Mahaabhutam** Who are these newcomers? What do they want?

**Mandodari** Sir, they have lost their sakti. They need to fly but they cannot. You can help them fly with your great powers!

**Mahaabhutam** Humans have no business here, and then two foreigners arrive at my doorstep full of demands!

**Taandavaraayan** Sir, they need your Magic. Please share it with them!



Suganya sings and swings her sword dangerously during the dress rehearsal. She rolls her eyes and gives Aadi and his friends the shock of their lives:

“How dare you stand before me without shame?

I am allergic to little kids. They’re such a pain.

I am the Mahaabhutam whose Magic can kill.

Where did you find the courage to approach me at will?”

Aiyappan draws in his breath. “She’s good. You wouldn’t say she is a girl.”



### Mahaabhutam

Do you believe Magic is play?  
Born yesterday, full of opinions today!  
Me you can't fool, better listen well or  
I'll cut you into pieces and throw you as food  
To the deadly vultures longing to eat  
Little people's fresh tender meat.

**Mahaabhutam** Rascals! Why should I share my knowledge with you? You think that's easy, huh? If you want to fly, you have to study the science of Magic deeply. You kids are too young to understand what it's all about. [Pointing at Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak] They can't either, because they've got a language problem! Now get out!

**Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak** [angrily]

Kottaa kittaa kittattaa,  
Kaakida kittaa kattattaa.

Let's forget about his Magic —  
Knowledge he does not want to share.  
We need nothing from the Mahaabhutam.  
Let him go to hell. We don't care!



Kottaa kittaa kittattaa

കൊട്ടാ കിട്ടാ കിട്ടാട്ടാ



Today is the arangetram. Everything is ready for the performance. The stage near the training shed has been cleaned of weeds. The girls have adorned it with a kolam — a decoration of white powder. The sand in front of the stage has been swept and lies white and quiet. Mats have been placed on it inviting the audience to sit down. In two hours the show will begin.

Aiyappan helps Saravanan with the preparations for the make-up. He sets out the boxes with coloured make-up powder and the mirrors. “Can you find me some sticks?” Saravanan asks him. It reminds Aiyappan of the time that he worked in the Kuttu company. It was his duty to collect a bunch of thin sticks broken off from a coconut broom before every performance. Sitting in the make-up room he would polish the outer ends of the sticks with care. Kuttu actors use sticks to put on their make-up, not brushes.

He remembers the excitement that a Kuttu performance would cause in a village. Curious children would take apart the thatch of the make-up room and peep inside. He sometimes tried to send them away but they would be back in no time.

Aiyappan used to play small roles: the lady friend of a princess or a young heroic prince. When spectators liked his performance they would give him a little money. Nice, but that was not what he wanted. He tried hard to copy the big heroic characters and to learn their parts by heart. Without help that was almost impossible. He asked the leader of his group many times to teach him the words and the melodies. The leader always replied: “Later, boy.” It never happened.



**Aadi** *[Trying to pacify the aliens]* Wait, don't get angry! Have a little patience! Why quarrel with this stone-hearted fellow? Let's look for another solution.

**Mandodari** Yes, let's go!

**Mahaabhutam** You believe you can leave that easily....?

**Mahaabhutam**

Stop! How dare you go!  
How irritating to think  
That you believe someone else  
May be cleverer than me!

**Mahaabhutam** You little shrimps! I will hunt you down!

*[The Mahaabhutam chases Mandodari & Taandavaraayan, Aadi, Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak off the stage. Mandodari & Taandavaraayan, Aadi and the aliens enter again.]*

**Taandavaraayan** Ah... somehow we managed to escape from the Mahaabhutam. But what can we do to help our guests get back their sakti, Mando-Monkey?

**Mandodari** Hey, did I hear you say Monkey again...?

**Taandavaraayan** Hmm.... sorry, Sister. Please give us a brilliant idea.

**Mandodari** Let me think. Mmmm. What if they swallow a pill? Will they get their sakti back? Shall we take them to our learned village doctor?

**Taandavaraayan** Super! Aadi, what do you say?

**Aadi** Never seen a doctor in my life! Sounds interesting, let's go!

**Taandavarayan** Friends, we'll go to the doctor!

**Modak Modak** Didadeen didadeem didadeem.

*[Exit all.]*



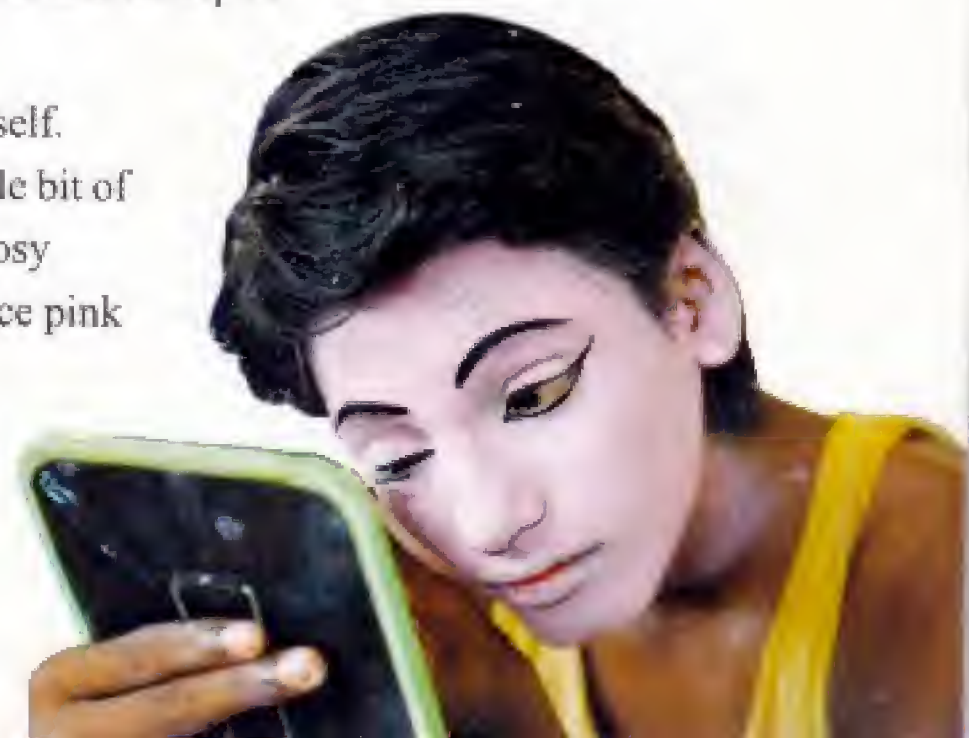


Saravanan lights a small oil lamp and places a garland of flowers on top of the crown Suganya will wear. The crown and other Kuttu ornaments stand on the floor. Rajagopal draws a sacred design on a plate with white powder. The staccato sound of the mridangam and hand cymbals fills the air. This is the puja to make sure that the performance will be successful.

Rajagopal dips his forefinger into the still wet powder on the plate. The children stand in front of him one by one while he draws a small white dot on each of their foreheads. The make-up begins. It is a complicated process. Different colours and different designs for each character. Normally actors do the make-up themselves, but the children have not yet learned how to do it. They are being made-up by the adult actors.

Everybody wants to be the first, but they are told to have a little patience. They begin with Tamilarasan, Suganya and Raamamurthi. First their faces are smeared with one basic colour. With the sticks that Aiyappan has collected, the make-up men draw the eyebrows in deep-black. A black line is added under the eyes to make them look bigger. Suganya gets curved lines on her cheeks. Right under these curves and on top of her eyebrows come rows of little white dots.

Aiyappan knows how to do the make-up himself. Coconut oil, a little water, a little bit of white, a little bit of red and a pinch of yellow. That gives a beautiful rosy colour. Just right for the Buffoon. He makes his face pink from hair to neck. Then he paints a colourful sun in white and red on his forehead. Lastly he draws a moustache of which one half is red and the other half white. His make-up is ready.



[Aasaimani enters.]

**Doctor Aasaimani**

I carry the titles M.B.B.S. and M.D.,  
I'm a doctor, just look at me,  
I've even finished a Ph.D.,  
So here I am, practicing homoeopathy.  
I give injections tirelessly,  
I am a doctor, don't you see?  
I was born in Mandaaraiyee,  
In Moscow I got a degree.  
Everyone here addresses me  
As Lady-Doctor Aasaimani.

**Doctor** I was born in Mandaarai and named 'Aasai'. I studied in London, but I got my M.B.B.S., M.D. and Ph.D. in Moscow. I returned to Mandaarai and started a doctor's practice — as a homoeopath. When the village people discovered my life-saving skills, they began to call me 'Aasaimani'. You know in Tamil 'Aasai' is 'Desire'. And 'Mani' means 'Money'. There are many patients waiting. Where's that Nurse Nakmaa? *[Talking into her mobile phone]* Hello, Nurse Nakmaa?

**Nakmaa** *[Only her voice is heard.]* Good morning, Madam.

**Doctor** Nurse, you'd better come quickly! All of yesterday's operation cases have to be discharged today. There are many new cases. And by the way, bring that sour-faced Raamasaami with you.

**Nakmaa** I will, Madam.

**Doctor** *[On the phone again]* Hello? Yes? Oh, it's you! Of course you can come at ten o'clock as long as you remember to bring cash with you. No credit cards, please!





The sky turns black. Bright lights illumine the open-air stage. Small serial lights in different colours twinkle on the walls of the compound. Aiyappan can see that there are already some people. They sit in groups on the ground and on the chairs in the back, chatting happily.

He looks at the other children. With their make-up on they look so different. Everybody is a little bit nervous. He too! Raamamurthi wears a blue skirt, a checked blouse and two plaits. He does a quick practice and lets his hands flow elegantly, like those of the girls. "Not bad. He's got it!" Aiyappan thinks. Tilakavathi looks on. Aiyappan sees that she bites her lip. The light pink make-up has changed her face. She does not talk.

Tilakavathi plays the lady-doctor. She wears a sari and a white doctor's coat. The ends of a stethoscope dangle from her neck. She has her long hair tied in a knot. She looks grown-up and distinguished. Aiyappan knows she is from a very poor family. Can she ever dream of becoming a doctor in real life? Who will pay for her university education?

But Tilakavathi would like to be a dancer or an actress. Will her parents allow her to pursue such a career? Most girls marry when they are fifteen or sixteen. Then, they have children and they have to look after the family. It would be really something if Tilakavathi could become a performer. Aiyappan hopes for her sake that her parents will be impressed by Tilakavathi's performance and that they will be proud of her. That would be a first step.



[Mandodari & Taandavaraayan, Aadi, Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak enter.]

**Taandavaraayan & Mandodari** Good morning, Madam! May we come in?

**Doctor** Of course! Do I keep my door shut like other doctors do? The door is wide open! You may enter as long as you bring the necessary matter with you, you understand? All right, who's not feeling well?

**Mandodari** We are perfectly healthy. But these two strangers who have come to our planet need sakti.

**Taandavaraayan** Yes, doctor! You must give them a pill so that they can regain their powers!

**Doctor** What? I must give them a medicine that will give them strength?

**Kadak Kadak** Kapraang kapraang kapraang.

**Modak Modak** Tudaang tudaang tudaang.

**Doctor** What's this? I haven't a clue what they're saying. [Talking to herself] What power-pill can I give them? But does it matter as long as I get my money?





A car drives up to the gate. It's a taxi. There's a large audience now. The few chairs in the back have been taken already. Quickly, extra chairs are arranged.

A man and a woman get down from the taxi. The woman has short hair and wears a nice sari. The man wears trousers and a T-shirt. They come backstage and talk to Loganaathan and Raamamurthi who play Taandavaraayan and his sister Mandodari.



"People from the city," someone whispers. "If they like the play perhaps they will ask us to perform in Chennai," murmurs another. That would be fun. Going to the city. Only a few children have been there. Will they get a chance to perform in a real theatre?

"What a smart little girl!" the woman says. Aiyappan has difficulties holding back his laughter. She does not realise that Mandodari is actually a boy, Raamamurthi!

The man and woman sit down in the chairs that have been arranged for them. The music begins. Aiyappan's throat feels dry. But when he joins the chorus his hoarseness disappears. He forgets that he is nervous. Singing is a good medicine.



*[Aadi has opened several bottles of medicine on the doctor's desk and has drunk from one of them. He staggers about like a drunk and causes a stir before falling unconscious to the ground.]*

**Doctor** What's all the fuss about?

**Taandavaaryan & Mandodari** Doctor-Madam, please see to our Aadi first. What's the matter with him?

**Doctor** *[Feeling Aadi's pulse]* Children, your Aadi has drunk some sleeping potion. He'll be fine after a while, don't worry! *[The doctor produces an enormous syringe.]* When I give these foreigners a TINY shot, they'll regain their sakti and they will be able to fly.

**Mandodari & Taandavaraayan** Then please do so immediately!

**Doctor** Patience! Before I give them the injection, I'd like to see money! You know, you can't trust anybody these days.

**Mandodari & Taandavaraayan** Money? What do you mean?

**Doctor** Oho... you don't know?





After the musical introduction Taandavaraayan and Mandodari go on stage. The chorus is silent. For a few seconds Aiyappan dreams off into his own future. He and his friends would like to have their own theatre group. Not now, but after a few years. They would like to play in villages. Also in the city and maybe even abroad. They would like to show what Kattaikkuttu is to people who have never seen it.

Aiyappan has heard his teachers complain that it is difficult to live from the Kuttu profession. Life has changed, also in the villages of Tamilnadu. People go to the movies, watch television and videos. Young boys no longer wear veshtis like their fathers. They wear trousers. Kuttu still has a lot of fans. Yet the younger generation sometimes feels that the theatre is old-fashioned. That there is not enough action. Nor even love stories. That performances are too long.



Doctor

Money, money, money,  
That is what I seek.  
Without its power,  
Your future is bleak.

When you have money,  
People follow blind,  
And what's really funny,  
Is that everyone is kind.

The rich stick together,  
Win titles and fame,  
Pat each other on the back,  
They're never to blame.

But when you are broke,  
And your money's gone,  
Then you know how hard it is,  
To get things done.

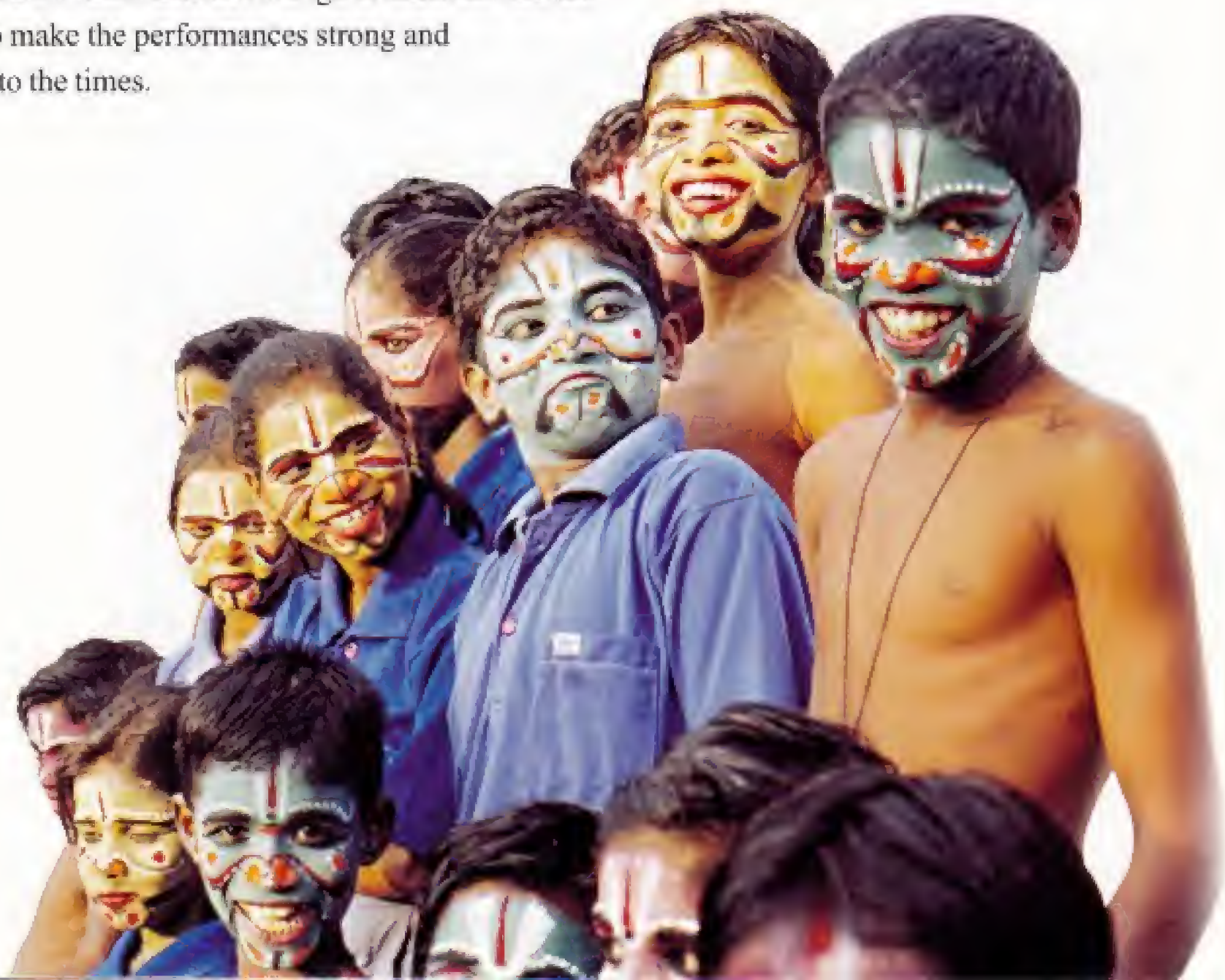
மணி மணி மணி மணி  
Money, money, money

மனிதனுக்கு என்றும் தேவை  
That is what I seek.





To catch the imagination of the young and the old, of people in villages and in the city, Aiyappan and his friends will have to become really good performers. They will have to be able to combine traditional, all-night stories with shorter performances on modern themes. The girls will have to find their own place and roles in the theatre. Boys and girls will have to work together using all their skills and knowledge to make the theatre work, to make the performances strong and attuned to the times.



**Doctor** Money means cash. Do you understand? Now first show me the money!

**Mandodari** Brother, we don't have any money. Aadi doesn't possess any either. Let's ask our visitors. Friends, do you have money?

**Kadak Kadak** Moneyaa?

**Taandavaraayan & Mandodari** Money! Do you have coins or notes?

**Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak** [*Gesturing that they do not have any money*]  
Pappada pappaa pappappaa, kappada kappa kappappaa.

**Taandavaraayan** Madam, we don't have money. They don't seem to have any money either. Please be kind and give them that injection. It will earn you a good name!

**Doctor** Young man, you can't succeed in this world if you look for goodness. I'll tell you once more with respect: If you have the money, we'll talk. If not, get out!

**Aadi** They've given her a fitting nickname, Aasaimoney! It reflects her character well! Forget this quack. Let's go. There's no point pleading with such a money-freak!

**Doctor** Hey, ugly monkey! What did you say? You drank from my sleeping potion and now you're insulting me? I'll kill you with a poisonous injection!

**Taandavaraayan & Mandodari** Aadi, run!

[*Exit all.*]



Money is important. When future performers of Kattaikkuttu earn a little more money, it will give them a better position in society. They will be able to pay their doctor's bills. Kuttu will become a better profession — for boys and for girls.



[Kaamini enters.]

**Buffoon Kaamini**

Here I come, the Buffoon,  
To join this grand assembly.  
Here I come, the Buffoon,  
Adorned with the name Kaamini.

**Kaamini** I am feeling so sleepy. Appaadaa! You have no idea how difficult it was to bamboozle my Kuttu vaathiyaar. Daily, without fail, I have to do the role of Buffoon. The other actors circle the stage just once before stuffing their mouths again with tobacco leaves. They make a trip to the tea-shop or they nap for a while. That's how they spend their time. Not me. I have been up so many nights and now I plan to sleep nicely throughout the day. If only these villagers would leave me alone. Why do they yell: 'Hey, Mr Buffoon, Mr Buffoon'? Why do they constantly want to wake me up? I cannot remember the last time I had a good night's sleep. That's why I disappeared secretly from the scene of the performance without even removing my make-up. Let me first take a nap before attending to any other work! That veranda over there looks really comfortable. I'll sleep there. [Calling out to the people of the house] Ladies-of-the-house, make sure no one wakes me up!

**Female voice from inside** Hey, don't stretch out there!

**Kaamini** Don't worry, woman. I'll just relax here for a while.

**Kaamini**

O delicious itlis and dosais  
With sambar and chutney so sweet,  
How could I abandon you,  
Just to get some sleep?  
A party for lunch they promised,  
Before I fled the scene.  
Alas, that was not meant to be,  
As hungry as this I've never been.  
Imagine if they'd feed us,  
Fried chicken and goat's meat,  
Fish kolumbu and scrambled eggs,  
I would soon be back on my feet!

[Kaamini falls asleep in the veranda.]





Now it is Aiyappan's turn. He climbs the three steps of the stage. He does not think anymore. With a smart kirikki he whirls into the light and begins his song. His voice is sound and clear. It is good. He stretches himself out on a small stool on stage, imagining that it is a veranda. He pretends to be asleep and snores loudly.

Buffoon Kaamini loves food — greasy, meaty delicious food that actors never get. Aiyappan plays that appetising food of all kinds arrives in Kaamini's dream. In delight, Kaamini reaches out with his hands to catch a delicious dosai. The audience starts to laugh. Then Kaamini curls up his legs and pulls them up to his neck. Aiyappan pretends that the Buffoon cannot unravel them. Suddenly his long arms and legs are of use, and funny too.



[Mandodari & Taandavaraayan, Aadi and Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak enter.]

**Aadi** [Pointing to Kaamini] Let's wake him up and ask him!

**Taandavaraayan & Mandodari** Isn't that our very own Kaamini? Mr Kaamini, Mr Kaamini, wake up, please!

**Kaamini** I was peacefully asleep. Why did you wake me up? Go away! [Kaamini goes back to sleep.]

**Aadi** Kaamini, don't go to sleep! Strain your brains for a second!

**Taandavaraayan & Mandodari** Please, Kaamini, Show-man! [Kaamini begins to undress sleepily.]

**Taandavaraayan & Mandodari** Why are you taking off your clothes?

**Kaamini** Isn't that what you told me to do? 'Kaa-mi-ni', you said, 'Show-me-you'! I thought you told me to show you who I was.

**Mandodari** But isn't your name Kaamini?

**Kaamini** Ummm, yes. Oh, I was so fast asleep I even forgot my name! When I heard 'Kaamini' I thought, I don't know... you told me to take off my clothes and show you who I was . . . Okay, so what is the matter? Why did you wake me up?

**Taandavaraayan** [Pointing at Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak] Mr Buffoon, they have lost their sakti. They are unable to fly away. You have to find a way out for them.

**Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak**

Kappadaa kappadakappaa kappadaang kappakappaa  
Tidaang tidaang tindida tindaang  
Midaakkida kidu kittu tattada kitta pattu  
Tidaang tidaang tindida tindaang  
We landed here suddenly.  
Without our sakti.  
How can we go back  
To our own galaxy?

கரடி ஷோமே கரடி ஷோமே  
Kaa-mi Show-me Kaa-mi Show-me





Every Kuttu performance has a Buffoon or *Kattiyakkaran*. He is a special character. Normally he is the first one to come on stage and introduce the play. But in *The Magic Horse* he is the last to appear.

As Buffoon you can improvise. You have to create your own role. You can talk to other characters — with respect or without. And you can talk to the audience about famous people and about politics. The Buffoon translates. Difficult words into easy ones. Difficult situations into everyday-life ones. And he makes sure that nobody falls asleep during the performance.

This Buffoon is different. Kaamini's only desire is to sleep. He is so tired from playing clown that he is unable to stand on his own legs. Again and again he falls over and drops off to sleep.

**Kaamini** What's this? Their speech is gobbledegook. I can't make head or tail of what they're saying!

**Aadi** They are asking you for advice! Where can they find sakti?

**Kaamini** If you think that sakti is something you can buy in a shop you're mistaken. Dear children, let's all lie down and close our eyes. Think of the power you need, imagine sakti and you will get it. Come let's lie down.

**Mandodari** Aadi, Taandavaraayan, what do you think?

**Taandavaraayan** Let's try what Kaamini says.

**Mandodari** [Addressing Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak] Friends, you too should close your eyes and lie down. Your power will return automatically. That's what Kaamini says.

**Kadak Kadak** Kabraang kabraang kabraang.

**Modak Modak** Tudaang tudaang tudaang.

*[All of them lie down. The Magic Horse appears, as if in a dream. Kadak Kadak & Modak Modak sit on it and fly away.]*







The play is over. The spectators get up. All the children come on stage with folded hands. The orchestra plays the *mankalam*, an auspicious song that concludes every performance. Aiyappan's eyes search the audience for familiar figures. Will they be there, his father and mother? No, they are not. Other children are surrounded by their families — grandparents, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews. Tears fill his eyes. But Aiyappan does not want to cry. Not now. Not here. He jumps off the stage and runs to the costume hall. Tears are streaming freely. He wipes them away with his hand.

There are messy stripes in pink and black on his hand — his own make-up. Aiyappan looks for the jar with coconut oil, closes his eyes and slowly removes his make-up. He wipes his face with an old piece of cloth when he hears someone calling. "Aiyappan, Aiyappan, where are you?" It is Devan, his friend.

Devan comes into the hall and looks at him. "Come on, let's go to the hostel. Don't you know there's lots of special food for us after our first performance?"

### *Song of the Magic Horse*

The Magic Horse came down to earth,  
And now has left to roam.  
It landed here in Mandaarai,  
To take these two back home.

Sakti is what's in your mind,  
Trust yourself, don't be shy,  
You hold the power in your hands,  
Believe in it and you will fly.

We praise you as we wave goodbye,  
Have a safe and happy flight,  
We thank all those who helped us out,  
Now go back home filled with delight.









**Taandavaraayan & Mandodari** Ah! They're on a horse and it's flying!

**Kaamini** That is the Magic Horse! They came to Earth on the Magic Horse. But then they forgot about it and lost their power. When they lay down and closed their eyes they remembered the Magic Horse again. So it appeared. Do you understand now what sakti means?

**Taandavaraayan** What does sakti mean?

**Kaamini** You still don't understand? Sakti means self-confidence. The Magic that comes when you believe in yourself. Trust your own abilities and follow your dreams. Understand?

**Taandavaraayan** Yes, now I got it! From now on I too shall believe in sakti. Friend Aadi, Sister, come, let's go home.

**Kaamini** Members of the audience, the dialogues and songs of **The Magic Horse** were written by P. Rajagopal. He also directed the play. Ideas for the story and the design of the costumes and props were by Hanne M. de Bruin. On behalf of the Kattaikkuttu Youth Theatre School and the Kattaikkuttu Sangam from Kanchipuram we thank all of you for your presence and support. Vanakkam!



The other children are seated already in long rows on the floor. Saravanan and Shanmugam help serve the food. "Aiyappan, you were really good. My little brothers laughed and laughed!" Anbarasu says. "You fell all the time, like this." Velucchaami demonstrates how Aiyappan fell during the play. Everybody laughs. Aiyappan feels warm inside. He sits down in front of his plate and eats. Opposite him sits Tilakavathi. She laughs.

Rajagopal tells the children that he is very proud of them. Everybody is silent when he speaks. It's important to know what their Kuttu vaathiyaar thinks of the performance. "It was a great performance. All of you played with confidence. You believed in yourself. You believed in your roles and made them real! And, I have a surprise. We have an invitation to perform in the city, in Chennai. We do not have a Magic Horse to take us there. We'll hire a bus instead!"

Everybody starts talking loudly to each other. Aiyappan closes his eyes and listens to their voices. "Nice place to be," he thinks. And he feels as tired as Kaamini.



Mankalam! Mankalam! Mankalam!  
மங்களம்! மங்களம்! மங்களம்!







## List of difficult words

**arangetram** first public performance of a play or dance

**Asaimani** asai literally means 'love, lust, desire'; mani could be the Tamil version of 'money', but mani also is a Tamil word that means 'jewel'. Asaimani or Money-love is the name of the Doctor in the play

**Buffoon** clown, jester, comedian, Kattiyakkaran

**dholak** a special kind of drum played together with a mridangam

**dosai** savoury pancake made with lentils and rice

**itli** rice dumplings

**joot** word used by children at play, the equivalent of saying 'you're it' or 'den'

**Kaamini** literally 'You Show Me', 'Showman', the Buffoon in the play

**Kattaikkuttu** a theatre performed in villages in North Tamilnadu, India; also called Kuttu

**Kattai vesham** a heroic character in the Kattaikkuttu theatre wearing wooden kattai ornaments laid-in with mirrors or coloured paper

**Kattiyakkaran** herald, Buffoon and Jack-of-all trades in the Kattaikkuttu theatre

**kirikki** pirouette

**kolam** decoration on the ground made by girls and women with white powder

**kolambu** thick soup with fish or vegetables

**Kuttu** see Kattaikkuttu

**Mahabharata** a long narrative about a family quarrel between five brothers and their hundred cousins ending in a deadly war

**Mahaabhutam** the Big Magician

**Mandaarai** name of the village in the play

**mankalam** auspicious song sung to conclude a play; word used at the end of the script of a play

**M.B.B.S.** Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery

**M.D.** Doctor of Medicine

**mridangam** a special kind of drum

**mukavinai** small, high pitched, hobo-like wind instrument

**papier mâché** paper pulp, used to make Parandaaman's shell

**Perungattuur** name of the village in the Cheyyar Taluk in Tamilnadu where Rajagopal was born

**Ph.D.** Doctor of Philosophy, a university title

**Ponnusami** name of Rajagopal's father, mentioned in a Kuttu song

**puja** worship

**sakti** power

**sambaar** see kolambu

**Vaathiyaar** master-teacher, guru

**vanakkam** greeting in Tamil, hello, how are you? Word used at the end of the script of play

**Brahma, Ganesha, Hari, Siva, Vishnu, Yama** — names of Hindu Gods





# A note to children, parents and teachers

This book consists of two parts: The text of the play *The Magic Horse* and Aiyappan's story.

## THE PLAY

Rajagopal conceived *The Magic Horse* as a new story performed in Kattaikkuttu style: for instance, the Mahaabhutam is built on Kuttu's heroic characters or Kattai veshams and the aliens Kadak Kadak and Modak Modak, too, are Kattai veshams of a sort. Aadi was inspired by the Monkey-God Hanumaan — a well-known character in Kuttu plays. For the making of the horse Hanne, who made the costumes for the performance, borrowed elements from the 'dummy horse' folk dance (poykaal kuthirai). The big difference is that this horse is a 'double seater' and the actors do not walk on stilts.

However, *The Magic Horse* is not bound to be performed in Kuttu style only. It could take on many other forms. We would be very happy if you would create and perform your own version of *The Magic Horse*. The play text contains some stage directions but you may change these and add your own ideas. Here are a few tips to develop your own play

## THE ORGANISATION OF THE PLAY

There are a lot of different tasks to realise a play and everybody can use her or his talent and contribute to the success of a novel *The Magic Horse*. Some children love to act, but there may be children who would prefer to make music, design costumes and props or look after the publicity. Children can take on the duties of director, musician, actor, costume designer, stage designer, light-technician or publicist.

## ACTING AND DIRECTING

When you act you have to believe in what you play. An actress or actor has to feel all the emotions. The director helps the actors to feel and act out these emotions and to build up a character. For instance, the aliens are sad because they want to go home but they cannot. Even



though we cannot understand their strange language, their sadness comes through in the way they speak. The Mahaabhutam is very powerful. He displays his power on stage by chasing the children, the aliens and Aadi. The doctor pretends to be a good person, but instead of caring for her patients she only cares for herself. You can see that in the way she moves and uses her voice.

The director should also have an overview of the entire action on the stage and 'direct' his actors when to enter or leave the stage, where to stand and when to say their lines or sing a song. He is responsible for linking the different scenes together and bringing out the overall theme of the play, sakti.

The characters in the play represent different forms of sakti — the quality that Kadak Kadak and Modak Modak have lost and that they are looking for. Together Mandodari, Taandavaraayan, Aadi, Kadak Kadak and Modak Modak investigate the different forms of sakti: Is it physical power symbolized by the tortoise Parandaaman who is very strong, but cannot fly? Is sakti magical knowledge (Mahaabhutam)? Or is it scientific knowledge (Doctor Aasaimani)? In the end the Kattiyakkaaran Kaamini unknowingly reveals sakti to be embodied within you. It's your own self-confidence and you are the master of it.

## **MUSIC**

The play (and Kattaikkuttu) uses Carnatic ragas, but you are free to use any other music — with or without the songs. Maybe there is a composer who can compose music.

Another solution is to recite the lyrics in stead of singing them. Music gives greater power to the text. Use music in between the text or to mark the ending of a scene.

## **VOICE TRAINING**

For actors it is important to speak in a loud voice. Everybody wants to understand the play clearly, especially because it is a new story.



## **MOVEMENT AND MIME**

Actors not only use text. They also use their bodies 'to speak'. Sometimes they say nothing and play without words. Aadi-the-monkey uses a lot of mime (through facial expressions). Not only does this make him a comic character, he also is able to get his message across without having to use words. You can bring in your own dance and body language into the play. The Mahaabhutam performs many fast kirikkis to impress the visitors and his audience. You may use pirouettes yourself or invent other fitting movements. The aliens belong to another planet. They use movements that are very different from ours. For instance, think about how they talk to each other, how they discover the planet Earth on which they have landed, how they behave when they meet the first human being of their lives and, if they do not have any money, what else might be valuable to them.

## **COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP**

Costumes and make-up are important in this play. You can copy the photos from the book and imitate them. But you can also make new, different costumes and invent your own make-up. Think about the character first, make a plan. How do you want to show the character? Then think also about practical issues. Are the costumes comfortable for the actors, can they move in it?

## **FINAL REHEARSAL**

Before you perform the play for a real audience for the first time, you should have one last final rehearsal where the actresses and actors wear their costumes and make-up. If you do so, you will find out whether everybody knows her/his lines and whether everything works out as you planned it. Thereafter, you can still solve problems or make last-minute changes.

## **PUBLICITY**

Make your own flyer or invitation for the performance. In it, write the name of the play, the name of the author (P. Rajagopal) and the names of the actresses, actors, musicians



and the director. You can add a summary of the play. And do not forget to mention the place and date of the performance and at what time it will begin. One or more students can write a review of the play and perhaps take their own pictures.

## **AIYAPPAN'S STORY**

Reading the story of Aiyappan may give rise to a lot of questions and things to think about. You could find out more by reading books and newspapers, interviewing people and talking about it with your friends, parents, other students and teachers. You could also make a presentation — you could use drawings or your own handicrafts or perhaps you would like to present the information you found or the questions you have in the form of a play.

Here are some questions you can use as a starting point:

- What are traditional performing arts in our country?
- Have you seen or performed traditional theatre yourself?
- Who performs it? When? Why?
- How many years of training do you need to become a performer?
- Is there a school to learn this art form? If there is no school where can you learn it? How?
- What is needed for a performance? Who pays for it and how much?
- What is the status of this art form and its performers? Should we care about preserving it?
- What does it tell us about our culture and identity?

In the book the Aiyappan and his fellow students think about the future and about the changes in the world. What would you like to be in the future? Did you ever talk to your grandparents about differences between the past and the present? How do they think about development? What do you think?



Aiyappan used to work in a professional theatre company. At that time he was about twelve years old and he was not attending school. What do you think about that and what do you think about child labour? How can we solve the problem of child labour?

How important is it that schools like the Kattaikkuttu Youth Theatre School exist? Would you support a School like this?

(Aiyappan is no longer a student of the Kattaikkuttu School. His parents wanted him to work in the city, because they badly needed the money. They took him out of the School. How is that possible?)

What are the differences between a village and a big town like Chennai? Which performances can you see in the big city and not in a village? Which performances can you see in a village only? Why is that? Do you think that people in the city will like a traditional performing art form, like Kattaikkuttu? Can it be performed in the same way as in the village or should it be adapted to suit a city audience? Which changes would you make?

What do you think of girls and women in theatre? Would you like to be a Kattaikkuttu performer yourself? Would you mind if your sister, wife or mother were a performer? Do you think that would cause any problems within your family or among your friends? How do you feel about a man performing a woman character and about women playing men?

## Further reading and viewing

[www.kattaikkuttu.org](http://www.kattaikkuttu.org)

DVD with the 2005 performance of *The Magic Horse* is available with Sue Rees, [www.suerees.org](http://www.suerees.org); email: [beep@well.com](mailto:beep@well.com)

Hanne M. de Bruin. 1999. *Kattaikkuttu: The Flexibility of a South Indian Theatre Tradition*. Groningen: Egbert Forsen. [ISBN 9069801035]

—. 1998. *Karna Moksham or Karna's Death*. A Play by Pakalentippulavar (Tamil text of an all-night Kattaikkuttu performance and English translation). Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, École Française d'Extrême-Orient, International Institute for Asian Studies.

*Indian Folklife. A Quarterly Newsletter from the National Folklore Support Centre* Serial No. 20, July 2005. 'Teaching and transmission of Indian Performing Arts' edited by Hanne M. de Bruin. Chennai: National Folklore Support Centre.

Books from Tulika Publishers, Chennai

*A Tree in my Village* by Paritosh Sen, 1998

*Suresh and the Sea* by Raghavendra Rao and Sandhya Rao, 1998

*Hina in the Old City* by Samina Misra, 2000

*The World of Indian Stories* by Cathy Spagnoli, 2003

*The Forbidden City* by T. V. Padma, 2004

*My Friend, the Sea* by Sandhya Rao, 2005





**P. Rajagopal** was born in the village of Perungattur in 1953. He moved to Kanchipuram to start, together with his wife Hanne M. de Bruin, the Kattaikkuttu Sangam in 1990 and the Kattaikkuttu Youth Theatre School in 2002. Rajagopal is the principal teacher and artistic director of the School. He is also a well-known Kattaikkuttu actor, and the author and director of new plays. In addition to 'The Magic Horse', he wrote the all-night play 'Veriyattam' and a short play 'The Milky Ocean'. The Sangam is a union that fights for better social and economic conditions of professional Kattaikkuttu players. Rajagopal has travelled many times to Europe where he performs and gives workshops. He is inspired by other Indian and Western art forms and creativity. His dream is to create a centre for the development of Kattaikkuttu and a place where different art forms can meet and be stimulated by each other.

**Hanne M. de Bruin** was born in the village of Kloetinge in 1959. She studied Indology at the University of Leiden, The Netherlands. Her Ph.D. thesis about the Kattaikkuttu theatre tradition was published as a book. As part of her work she translated an all-night traditional Kuttu play 'Karna Moksham' into English. Hanne has worked as a research fellow at several different research institutions in India and abroad. She speaks Tamil and has lived in Tamilnadu for the last fifteen years. Since 2002 she has been working, together with her husband Rajagopal, full-time for the Kattaikkuttu School.

**Evelien Pullens** was born in The Hague (The Netherlands) in 1963. She is a puppeteer, theatre teacher and author of children books. She is based in The Netherlands, where she works with her own theatre group and has published five children's books of fiction. Since 2003 she has been frequently to India. Evelien has done drama/puppetry workshops at the Kattaikkuttu School, Ninasam (Heggodu) and Rangayana (Mysore).

**Marinde Hurenkamp** was born in The Netherlands in 1969. She studied Theatre, Film and Television, and recently took a degree at the Photo Academy in Amsterdam. She did research on community art and children's theatre in Asia and worked for a while with a theatre group in Orissa. In the Netherlands she had different jobs in the field of media and international cooperation. Some of her photographs have been published in Dutch magazines on social and cultural issues. In 2004 Marinde set up a photography workshop for the students of the Kattaikkuttu School.

Aiyappan & the Magic Horse (English)

ISBN 81-8146-153-3

© Text and photographs Kattaikkuttu Sangam

First published in India 2005

design Radhika Menon

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This book is a collective work of fantasy. It came into being thanks to the energy of the students of the Kattaikkuttu Youth Theatre School in Kanchipuram and the financial assistance of HIVOS, Bangalore, India.

P. Rajagopal is the author of *The Magic Horse* or *Maya Kudirai*, a children's play in Tamil that he wrote in 1995.

It has been translated into English by Hanne M. de Bruin.

The story of Aiyappan at the Kattaikkuttu School is by Hanne M. de Bruin and Evelien Pullens. It is based on real-life facts. Aiyappan joined the School as a student in 2002. Before that he worked as a child-actor in a professional company. However, the representation of Aiyappan's thoughts, feelings and actions are based on the imagination of the authors who are entirely responsible for telling the story of his life.

The other boys who appear in the book are Dillibabu, Anbarasu, Tamilarasan and Raamamurthi. The girls you meet are Tilakavathi and Suganya. All of them study at the School. In the pictures you can sometimes also see other students. All the students, and their Kuttu teachers Rajagopal, Saravanan, Shanmugam and Masilamani, have allowed us to tell about them, and to use their pictures in this book. We hope that this book will help them, too, to become good performers and learn about the world.

Photography is by Marinde Hurenkamp and Hanne M. de Bruin. The photograph used on page 1 is by Evelien Pullens.

Published by

Tulika Publishers, 13 Prithvi Avenue, Abhiramapuram, Chennai 600 018, India

email/ tulikabooks@vsnl.com website www.tulikabooks.com

Printed and bound by

Sudarsan Graphics, 27 Neelakanta Mehta Street, T. Nagar, Chennai 600 017, India





**AIYAPPAN AND THE MAGIC HORSE** is the third book in the series **Where I Live**. This series explores living traditions and traditional lifestyles in various parts of India, through a study of children in different environments. Presented through engaging visuals and imaginative narration, they offer to children everywhere ways of exploring these worlds and their own. The other titles in the series are *Suresh and the Sea* and *Hina in the Old City*.

Fifteen-year-old Aiyappan lives in Kanchipuram, Tamilnadu, India. He learns a traditional form of folk theatre called Kuttu at the Kattaikuttu School run by the master-teacher, Kuttu vaathiyaar, P. Rajagopal. He also learns Maths, Science, Languages and Computers along with his classmates – many boys and some girls!

Their teacher has written an unusual Kuttu play, *The Magic Horse*, especially for them – a play about a strange encounter between two children and two aliens, a play that invents a new language for the aliens which only the all-knowing monkey, Aadi, can understand. As the children rehearse for their first public performance, they learn to sing, dance, and of course, speak this new language . . . Pada pada pandil Kida Kida kindi! . . . alienspeak that children love!

The script of this contemporary play in a traditional style is presented in this book, and includes stage directions so that others can perform it in their own ways. Contrasting with the dramatic vigour is a gentle narrative that offers glimpses into the Kuttu tradition, the life of Kuttu artists and their environment, the dreams of Aiyappan and his friends, and how girls, too, want to perform Kuttu. By focussing on a local, traditional folk art, the book helps children make connections with people who live outside their own familiar worlds. More importantly, the book helps build bridges between cultures and worlds and experiences.

The rich photographs of the children at play and at school and the engaging design of the book capture the colours, look and feel of a live Kuttu performance. A note for teachers and a reading list add value.

Age 10+

Rs 150

